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ABSTRACT

Previous research shows that successful schools have competent principals. In the Upper Cumberland Development District of Tennessee, 350 teachers and 350 parents were surveyed concerning the capability of principals in the district's most efficient schools. Eighty-four percent of the teachers and 78 percent of the parents completed the questionnaire. The survey responses reveal that parents and teachers generally disagreed on whether or not definite goals had been designated; on their degree of involvement in goal-setting; on the degree to which frequent communication with parents was characteristic of the schools; and on whether or not the school atmosphere facilitated learning. They generally agreed that the principals cared about academic achievement; that the principals were experienced in school matters; that the principals were not the instructional leaders of the schools; that the parents supported the schools; that the principals sufficiently notified the community concerning school matters; and that students spent enough time on instructional activities. The parents generally indicated a desire for more improvement than the teachers. An emphasis on communications is suggested. Included are 10 references, results of the questionnaire item by item, and an appended copy of the questionnaire. (RG)

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A STUDY TO DETERMINE PARENTS' AND TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PUBLIC SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN THE UPPER CUMBERLAND DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT OF TENNESSEE

A Research Paper
Presented at
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in Mobile, Alabama

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INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Introduction

Successful schools usually have effective leaders. Contemporary research findings show that creative building level leadership is an essential consideration when investigating the characteristics of effective schools. Numerous studies have systematically reported that among the prominent descriptions of successful schools are factors such as strong instructional leadership, evidence of continuous program planning, high performance expectations, a positive school environment, and adequate support services. An effective leader is a central figure in assuring that these conditions are achieved. Indeed, the school principal is a primary actor in influencing and guiding the school toward the accomplishment of identified goals. It is the school principal's responsibility to determine and communicate school goals, set expectations, monitor instructional progress, support educational programs and services, and conduct regular evaluations. The effectiveness of the principal will directly impact upon student and teacher performance as well as determine parent's attitudes toward and support for the public school.

Statement of the Problem

The improvement of public education continues to be an issue of immeasurable importance. A good school does not simply evolve. Effective schools are the result of consci-

entious efforts by school personnel, parents, other citizens, and support groups. Among those within the educational establishment who most directly enhance school success are building level administrators. Past studies concerning quality schools consistently focus on the need for capable principals. It is especially noteworthy that parents and teachers be included in these investigations. Assessment practices should be continued in a systematic fashion and the findings used for school evaluation and continuous progress toward excellence in personnel, programs and services.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to determine the perceptions held by parents and teachers concerning the effectiveness of principals leading the public schools within the Fourteen County Upper Cumberland Development District of Tennessee.

Importance of the Study

The significance of sound building level leadership cannot be overemphasized. The success of the school is in large measure influenced by the principal. It has been decided that certain qualities are characteristic of effective public school principals. These qualities include having clearly defined goals and vision for their accomplishment, high expectations for achievement, interest in curriculum improvement and the learning environment, and a commitment to positive community partnerships. The position requires a creditable

effort to balance instructional development, basic management skills, and leadership.

Interestingly, a review of the several factors common to successful schools indicates many similarities to those attributed to effective principals. Effective schools have been found to have identified school purposes, creative leaders, high expectations for students and school personnel, workable relationships with the community, a good climate for learning, frequent monitoring of student progress, commitment to the educational program, and evaluation of programs and personnel. There is direct relationship between the perceptions held about the competency of the principals and perceptions held concerning the strength of the school.

The determination of the effectiveness of the school principal will provide an important measure of the health of the school and its success in meeting the needs of its constituency. Subsequently, the data may be used for personnel analysis, school assessment, and community relations development. The results of the study should compliment overall school development and lead to meaningful improvements.

Research Procedure

The State of Tennessee is organized into nine development districts for the purpose of rendering various programs and services. The Upper Cumberland Development District which includes fourteen counties of northern, rural middle Tennessee

was chosen for this study. A questionnaire was distributed to a sample of 350 teachers and 350 parents representing the school systems in the geographic region comprising the Upper Cumberland Development District. The questionnaire return rate was 294 (84%) for teachers and 273 (78%) for the group of parents. Ms. Susan Borden served as a research assistant on the project and coordinated the literature review and data collection process.

The data were presented through a descriptive technique showing a comparison of the responses of the two groups for each questionnaire item. A narrative analysis of the data is provided. The Chi-square test was used to report the signfi-ficance of the data at the .05 level.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The key person in the quest for excellence in the school environment is the principal. Through the principal's guidance and influence the schools have the impetus to become better centers of learning and service. A consistent finding in much of the effective schools research is that the better schools have strong administrative leadership. Arthur Jago examined the concept of leadership and stated:

> Leadership is a process and a property. The process of leadership is the use of noncoercive influence to direct and coordinate the activities of the members of an organized group toward the accomplishment of group objectives. As a property, leadership is a set

of qualities or characteristics attributed to those who are perceived to successfully employ such characteristics.[1]

The precept of the public school principal should embody this concept. The principal, as the building level leader, should consult with school personnel and community members, should draw upon experience and personal expertise, should consider educationally sound practices, and provide meaning to the common cause of providing viable educational programs and experiences for the students enrolled in school.

An effective principal is involved in needs assessment and setting goals and priorities for the school. It is appropriate that the principal demonstrate serious concern for student achievement and progress toward stated goals and instructional objectives. The literature concerning effective principals provides insight into certain characteristics which are deemed basic for effectiveness. Charles A. Reavis lists five noteworthy factors: The effective principal

1. establishes an orderly school climate,
2. sets high expectations for students and staff,
3. is highly visible in the school,
4. emphasizes academic achievement, and
5. acts as a facilitator.[2]

A number of other researchers and writers support the importance of these characteristics. Robert E. Blum and colleagues investigated this matter and reported their conclusions in Educational Leadership and decided that an

effective principal has a clear vision of where the school is going and makes conscientious efforts to communicate school direction to staff, students, and parents.[3] It is timely to seek active support from school personnel and parents to assure adequate resources are made available. Setting clear priorities is important to an effective leader. Improved communications should lead to improved school and community relations.

The positive school principal sets a tone of high expectations and stresses achievement of students, teachers, and other staff. The successful leader gives high priority to activities, instruction, and resource materials that foster academic success. As chief coordinator of the school's staff development, an effective principal provides the resources and activities that are considered necessary to meet perceived needs.[4]

It is agreed that an effective principal ensures that the school's environment is conducive to learning. A safe, orderly school facilitates teaching and learning. The school environment includes physical qualities of the school facilities, the discipline of the school, the climate of trust and cooperativeness, personal relationships, leadership style, human relations, decision making processes, and community relations. The strong principal provided for "purposing", a term defined by Peter Vaill as, "that continuous stream of actions by an organization's formal leadership which has the effect of inducing clarity, consensus, and commitment regarding the organization's basic purpose.[5]

Blum, Butler, and Olsen stated that an effective principal establishes and maintains a curriculum related to goals and identified priorities. Clear instructional objectives are established and appropriate activities pursued. Curriculum planning, coordination of activities, and regular monitoring of student progress is characteristic of a successful school. Quality use of time and time-on-task should not be overlooked. In classroom observation of instructional practices, an evaluative feedback, protection of instructional time, assuring a balanced program, and high visibility are indications of strong leadership at the building level.[6]

Phillip Hallinger and Joseph F. Murphy believe that the principal's role comprises three dimensions of instructional leadership activity: defining the school mission, managing the instructional program, and promoting the school learning climate.[7] The principal often sets the tone of the school environment. The school and staff tend to develop a personality similar to that of the principal. The effective principal has empathy for the staff and students, is sensitive to the needs of teachers, students, and parents, and is perceived as being a caring, concerned leader. Ann Hassenpflug points out that positive interaction between teachers, parents, and principal should be a continuous process. A much healthier climate will exist when all involved work together as colleagues.[8] Peter Martimore and Pam Sammons summarized this concept when they said, "purposeful leadership occurs where

The principal understands the needs of the school and is actively involved in the school's work, without exerting total control."[9] In a recent study, Helen Felserthal found:

> Research results indicate that srong leadership from the principal was the most crucial factor in the school's effectiveness, especially as exhibited in the principal's impact on school climate, expectations, academic standards, and parent-school relations.[10]

PRESENTATION OF THE DATA

The purpose of the study was to investigate the perceptions of teachers and parents concerning the effectiveness of principals in selected middle Tennessee school systems. The data are presented using a questionnaire item by questionnaire item reporting technique. The data were compared using a SAS computerized program. The findings of the study follow.

1. **The administration and faculty have a clear sense of the mission of the school.**

Teachers		Parents	
A	D	A	D
259 (88%)	35 (12%)	87 (32%)	186 (68%)
Chi Square 188.155		Significant at .05 level	

2. **There is dedication to academic excellence by the principal.**

Teachers		Parents	
A	D	A	D
235 (80%)	59 (20%)	227 (83%)	46 (17%)
Chi Square 0.972		Not Significant at .05 level	

3. The principal has clear goals for the school and has transmitted these goals to the faculty and community.

Teachers		Parents	
A	D	A	D
150 (51%)	144 (49%)	71 (26%)	202 (74%)

Chi Square 37.236 — Significant at .05 level

4. The principal has engaged parents and faculty in the development of school goals.

Teachers		Parents	
A	D	A	D
253 (86%)	41 (14%)	60 (22%)	213 (78%)

Chi Square 235.023 — Significant at .05 level

5. The school enjoys strong support from parents and the community.

Teachers		Parents	
A	D	A	D
185 (63%)	109 (37%)	210 (77%)	63 (23%)

Chi Square 13.125 — Significant at .05 level

6. An atmosphere of professional collegiality, mutual respect, and support exist among school personnel and students.

Teachers		Parents	
A	D	A	D
232 (79%)	62 (21%)	93 (34%)	180 (66%)

Chi Square 116.368 — Significant at .05 level

7. The principal is the instructional leader in the school and spends a significant amount of time on instructional matters.

Teachers		Parents	
A	D	A	D
135 (46%)	159 (54%)	106 (39%)	167 (61%)

Chi Square 2.912 — Not Significant at .05 level

8. **The principal is knowledgeable about school affairs such as business management, curriculum issues, teacher evaluation, and student services.**

Teachers		Parents	
A	D	A	D
262 (89%)	32 (11%)	218 (80%)	55 (20%)

Chi Square 9.349 Significant at .05 level

9. **The principal informs the school board, parent groups, business leaders, and others concerning school needs.**

Teachers		Parents	
A	D	A	D
253 (86%)	41 (14%)	207 (76%)	66 (24%)

Chi Square 9.677 Significant at .05 level

10. **School rules and standards of behavior are clearly specified and published.**

Teachers		Parents	
A	D	A	D
159 (54%)	135 (46%)	71 (26%)	202 (74%)

Chi Square 46.276 Significant at .05 level

11. **School rules and consequences for violations are clearly communicated to parents.**

Teachers		Parents	
A	D	A	D
203 (69%)	91 (31%)	79 (29%)	194 (71%)

Chi Square 91.097 Significant at .05 level

12. **School rules are fairly and consistently applied among all students.**

Teachers		Parents	
A	D	A	D
209 (71%)	85 (29%)	120 (44%)	153 (56%)

Chi Square 42.785 Significant at .05 level

13. **Systematic communication efforts and regular contact with parents is characteristic of the school.**

Teachers		Parents	
A	D	A	D
118 (40%)	176 (60%)	49 (18%)	224 (82%)

Chi Square 33.537 Significant at .05 level

14. **The principal has strong, positive leadership skills.**

A	D	A	D
203 (69%)	91 (31%)	150 (55%)	123 (45%)

Chi Square 11.981 Significant at .05 level

15. **High principal visibility is characteristic in the school.**

A	D	A	D
244 (83%)	50 (17%)	257 (94%)	16 (09%)

Chi Square 17.098 Significant at .05 level

16. **The principal and teachers have high expectations for students and assume responsibility for student accomplishment.**

A	D	A	D
265 (90%)	29 (10%)	207 (76%)	66 (24%)

Chi Square 20.788 Significant at .05 level

17. **The principal provides for the monitoring of student progress on a regular basis.**

Teachers		Parents	
A	D	A	D
270 (92%)	24 (08%)	232 (85%)	41 (15%)

Chi Square 6.554 Significant at .05 level

18. **The school is characterized by policies and demonstrated practices which convey the importance of high achievement for students.**

Teachers		Parents	
A	D	A	D
226 (77%)	68 (23%)	177 (65%)	96 (35%)

Chi Square 9.974 Significant at .05 level

19. **The academic achievement of the school is at an acceptable level.**

Teachers		Parents	
A	D	A	D
71 (24%)	223 (76%)	104 (38%)	169 (62%)

Chi Square 12.902 Significant at .05 level

20. **The school has a climate which facilitates the learning environment.**

Teachers		Parents	
A	D	A	D
188 (64%)	106 (36%)	112 (41%)	161 (59%)

Chi Square 29.846 Significant at .05 level

21. **The students devote a significant amount of time to instructional activities, time on task, and completing organized assignments.**

Teachers		Parents	
A	D	A	D
253 (86%)	41 (14%)	218 (80%)	55 (20%)

Chi Square 3.870 Not Significant at .05 level

22. **The principal plans for program and other school improvements.**

Teachers		Parents	
A	D	A	D
244 (83%)	50 (17)	55 (20%)	218 (80%)

Chi Square 224.312 Significant at .05 level

23. **The principal of the school has vision and optimism concerning the future of improvements in public schools.**

Teachers		Parents	
A	D	A	D
215 (73%)	79 (27%)	142 (52%)	131 (48%)

Chi Square 27.063 Significant at .05 level

24. **The principal recognizes and rewards the efforts and successful accomplishments of students and teachers.**

Teachers		Parents	
A	D	A	D
129 (44%)	165 (56%)	167 (61%)	108 (39%)

Chi Square 16.969 Significant at .05 level

25. **The principal motivates school personnel and students to do their best in most situations.**

Teachers		Parents	
A	D	A	D
129 (44%)	165 (56%)	172 (63%)	101 (37%)

Chi Square 20.792 Significant at .05 level

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

There was a significant difference between teachers and parents concerning the school personnel's sense of mission for the schools. The results show that the two groups dc not agree that there are clear goals established. A total of 74 percent of the parents did not believe that school goals were transmitted to the faculty or community. The teachers generally felt engaged in goal development, but parents did not. There was agreement between parents and teachers that the school principal was committed to academic excellence. Teachers (89%) and parents (80%) thought that the principals were knowledgeable about school management, teacher evaluation, curriculum issues, and student affairs. However, neither group reported that they perceived principals to serve as the instructional leader of the school.

About three-fourths of the parents responding (78%) stated that they were not participants in goal setting but, most teachers (86%) were involved. When asked about their level of support for the schools, some 77 percent indicated that parents provide strong support for the schools. A total of 63 percent of the teachers responded positively to this query. Most teachers (86%) thought that the principal adequately informed the public concerning school matters and 76 percent of the parents agreed. A total of 82 percent of the parents did not feel that regular contact with parents was characteristic of of the school. There was a significant difference between the groups.

A difference existed in the perceptions of the parent group and teacher group regarding the principal's planning activities, motivation techniques, reward efforts, visibility, and expectations for students and teachers. There was concern expressed in the matters of fair discipline, publishing of school rules and standards, consequences for violation of school regulations, and clear communication practices. A majority of the teachers (64%) agreed but, a majority of the parents (59%) disagreed that the school climate was conducive to learning. Both groups were satisfied with the amount of time students devote to instructional activities.

Overall, the parent group thought more improvement should be made while teachers indicated more satisfaction with the school principals. It is concluded that principals in the study region should give serious attention to the findings of the research project. The two groups responding held statistically different perceptions in most instances. Serious attention should be given to a viable communications and public relations initiatives. The study provided relevant data and offers insights into the effectiveness of the school leadership. The results of the study should compliment school development and meaningful improvement.

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APPENDIX A

Effectiveness Survey

Check appropriate discriptor:

_____ Teacher

_____ Parent

Please respond to each of the following statements by circling **A** (agree) or **D** (disagree).

A D 1. The administration and faculty have a clear sense of the mission of the school.

A D 2. There is dedication to academic excellence by the principal.

A D 3. The principal has clear goals for the school and has transmitted these goals to the faculty and community.

A D 4. The principal has engaged parents and faculty in the development of school goals.

A D 5. The school enjoys strong support from parents and the community.

A D 6. An atmosphere of professional collegiality, mutual respect, and support exist among school personnel and students.

A D 7. The principal is the instructional leader in the school and spends a significant amount of time on instructional matters.

A D 8. The principal is knowledgeable about school affairs such as business management, curriculum issues, teacher evaluation, and student services.

A D 9. The principal informs the school board, parent groups, business leaders, and others concerning school needs.

A D 10. School rules and standards of behavior are clearly specified and published.

A D 11. School rules and consequences for violations are clearly communicated to parents.

A D 12. School rules are fairly and consistently applied among all students.

A D 13. Systematic communication efforts and regular contact with parents is characteristic of the school.

A D 14. The principal has strong, positive leadership skills.

A D 15. High principal visibility is characteristic of the school.

A D 16. The principal and teachers have high expectations for students and assume responsibility for student accomplishment.

A D 17. The principal provides for the monitoring of student progress on a regular basis.

A D 18. The school is characterized by policies and demonstrated practices which convey the importance of high achievement for students.

A D 19. The academic achievement of the students is at an acceptable level.

A D 20. The school has a climate which facilitates the learning environment.

A D 21. The students devote a significant amount of time to instructional activities, time on task, and completing organized assignments.

A D 22. The principal plans for program and other school improvement.

A D 23. The principal of the school has vision and optimism concerning the future of improvements in public schools.

A D 24. The principal recognizes and rewards the efforts and successful accomplishments of students and teachers.

A D 25. The principal motivates school personnel and students to do their best in most situations.